



Lincoln Journal Star

Newest Supreme Court judge offers Southeast students a real-life lesson in civics

October 23, 2015 9:00 pm • By [Margaret Reist](#) | [Lincoln Journal Star](#)



Lincoln Southeast senior Cadet Fowler (right), 17, explores behind the bench of the Nebraska Supreme Court with his classmates after the ceremonial swearing-in for Nebraska Supreme Court Justice Stephanie Stacy Friday in the Warner Chamber at the Capitol.

Talk about a teachable moment.

Stephanie F. Stacy was officially sworn in as the newest Nebraska Supreme Court justice Friday in a ceremony attended by state and federal judges, attorneys, family and friends -- and about 50 Lincoln Southeast High School seniors.

Those seniors watched the ceremony from the balconies of the State Capitol's Warner Chamber, took a tour of the Supreme Court led by Chief Justice Michael Heavican, and attended a reception in the Capitol's state library.

That's the sort of opportunity that presents itself when your classmates' mom gets appointed to the Nebraska Supreme Court, especially when she's a Knight herself, and one who sees an opportunity to bring civics alive for students taking a required upper level civics class called government and politics.

"I want them to learn to be involved and ask questions and be engaged," said Stacy, who was a partner at Baylor, Evnen, Curtiss, Gruit & Witt before being appointed a Lancaster County district court judge in 2011.

Stacy, who replaces retired Justice Kenneth C. Stephan, is the second woman appointed to the state's highest court and Gov. Pete Ricketts' first Supreme Court appointment.

The mother of four sons -- triplets who are seniors at Southeast and an older brother who couldn't make it to the ceremony because he's on his way to Florida for a collegiate mock trial competition -- said she wanted to make the ceremony a learning experience.

So she talked with Principal Brent Toalson about it, then dropped off a bunch of invitations. She tried to tie Friday's remarks to the curriculum, and she plans to visit the classes later, so students can ask questions.

She'd already taken the official oath before Friday's ceremony, which allowed her to hear oral arguments as a member of the court this week, and she talked Friday about how remarkable that was for her.

"It reminded me that an ordinary person can have extraordinary opportunities," she said, as long as they are supported by family and friends and a quality education (are you listening, students in the balconies?).

She referred to the inscription above the north entrance to the Warner Chamber: "The Salvation of the State is Watchfulness of the Citizen." The ceremony, she said, was an opportunity to celebrate a system of self-government that requires the participation and stewardship of everyone.

It doesn't mean becoming a judge necessarily, she said, but it requires a commitment to educating oneself on the issues, to voting and getting involved.

After the ceremony, students got a lesson in the judiciary from the chief justice himself, as they sat in the benches of the Supreme Court. They learned about the secret door behind the bench, from which the justices emerge to preside over oral arguments.

Then the students got to sit in those justices' seats themselves, and pass through the secret door to another room, where the justices discuss cases and make decisions.

Senior Caitlynn Croner said it made government seem real.

"When you read about it, it seems like a faraway place, but it's right here," she said.

That was the sort of reaction teacher Zach Wojtowicz was hoping for on Friday.

"I hope it kind of resonates with them that the things we talk about are relevant and important and real," he said.

Reach the writer at 402-473-7226 or mreist@journalstar.com.



Lincoln, NE - 10/23/2015 - Newly appointed Nebraska Supreme Court Judge Stephanie Stacy speaks during her investiture ceremony on Friday, Oct. 23, 2015, in the Warner Chamber at the Capitol.



Stephanie Stacy speaks during her investiture ceremony on Friday, Oct. 23, 2015, in the Warner Chamber at the Capitol



Omaha World Herald

Stephanie Stacy becomes second woman to sit on Nebraska Supreme Court

POSTED: 9:16 PM, FRI OCT 23, 2015.

By Martha Stoddard / World-Herald Bureau



LINCOLN — Nebraska Supreme Court Judge Stephanie Stacy has already heard her first cases as a member of the state's high court, after taking her oath privately on Sept. 28.

On Friday, she repeated the oath at an investiture ceremony attended by Gov. Pete Ricketts, the full Supreme Court and Court of Appeals, numerous other state and federal judges, friends and family.

Stacy credited many of those present with helping her reach that position. And she pledged to work hard to justify the trust placed in her.

According to former colleagues, that trust is well-placed.

Randall Goyette, who worked with Stacy at the Baylor Evnen law firm, said she never took short cuts or produced work that was less than perfect.

"Judge Stacy brings her entire self to everything she does," he said.

Stacy's tenure as a trial court judge was marked by wisdom, compassion, love of the law, a diplomatic style and her good nature, said Lancaster County District Judge Jodi Nelson.

Stacy's family joined her on stage during the ceremony. Her mother, Anabeth Frazier Cox, held the Bible for the oath of office.

Her husband, Dave, and triplet sons, Will, Ben and Jack, who are high school seniors, helped her put on her robe. A fourth son, Sam, could not attend.

Stacy became the second woman on the state high court bench. She replaced former State Supreme Court Judge Kenneth C. Stephan, who retired July 1.

She had served as a Lancaster County district judge since 2011.

Previously, she was a partner at Baylor Evnen and an adjunct faculty member teaching trial advocacy and pretrial litigation at the University of Nebraska College of Law. She started her legal career as a judicial law clerk for U.S. District Judge David Piester.

Stacy holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and graduated with distinction from the NU College of Law in 1991.

Contact the writer: 402-473-9583, martha.stoddard@owh.com